

Milwaukee Water Works

Safe, Abundant Drinking Water.



Milwaukee Water Continues to be Safe to Drink

Feb. 14, 2011

The Milwaukee Water Works (MWW) and the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) assure the public the drinking water is safe for public use. Continued and frequent testing of the water by Milwaukee Water Works and review of public health surveillance data collected by the City Health Department indicate the water is safe to drink and use for other purposes such as cooking, cleaning and bathing.

A recent news story described a research study which reported that between 2002 and 2007 there was a slight increase in children visiting a local emergency room on the fourth day following a rain event. One theory the researchers suggested was that contaminants leaked into drinking water pipes during rainfall. However, the study provided no plausible mechanism or evidence that this scenario is actually occurring or is scientifically valid.

There are many limitations to this study, some of which the authors acknowledge but others that are not directly addressed including:

- Neither microbial nor chemical analysis of drinking water was conducted that identified a disease-causing organism or contaminant responsible for acute gastrointestinal illness described in the study. The researchers simply conducted statistical analysis of regional rainfall events and OBSERVED pediatric emergency room visits and inferred causality (i.e., drinking water source)
- The researchers did not conduct any study of distribution system defects that would support their theory that contaminants leak into pressurized pipes in any concentration that would compromise water quality and create a public health threat. The researchers ignored many other more prevalent and common sources and risk factors associated with acute gastrointestinal illness within the community and focused exclusively on drinking water as an origin of contaminant exposure to the population studied.

Please note the MWW does test actual drinking water collected from taps in public and private buildings throughout the distribution system. The utility collects and analyzes a minimum of 240 samples per month, every month, from 64 different sites for microbiological parameters. An additional 45 to 55 samples each month are tested for 32 additional physical and chemical parameters.

Furthermore, the Milwaukee Water Works tests source and treated drinking water for over 500 contaminants even though the EPA requires tests for only 90. This is done as a precaution to ensure safe water, to collect baseline data for study and to meet future regulations. To ensure the public is fully aware of all water quality monitoring data, MWW publicizes it in the annual consumer confidence report and on its website, (<http://city.milwaukee.gov/water/about/WaterQuality.htm>).

Finally, the MWW treats Lake Michigan water in a multiple-step process to remove illness-causing microorganisms and contaminants. The water is disinfected with ozone, a highly reactive gas that destroys microorganisms, removes taste and odor, and reduces byproducts from chlorine disinfection. Coagulation, settling, and biologically active filtration remove additional particles. Fluoride is added for dental health. Final chloramine disinfection ensures safe drinking water throughout the distribution system and at consumer faucets.

If there were ANY concern or discernable problem with water quality that would result in a threat to public health, the Milwaukee Water Works and the Milwaukee Health Department would immediately notify the public and take swift and appropriate corrective actions. Consumers who wish to report a water quality complaint should contact their local water utility. In the City of Milwaukee, citizens can call (414) 286-2830.

As a matter public health policy and practice, the MHD reminds persons with any medical or urgent health concern to contact their health care provider for appropriate follow-up. Certain disease conditions are reportable to local public health authorities and are part of a regional and state surveillance system.

Further information will be posted on the MWW (www.milwaukee.gov/water) and MHD website (<http://city.milwaukee.gov/health>) on this subject as warranted and available.

The Milwaukee Water Works serves Milwaukee and 15 suburbs: Brown Deer, Butler, Franklin, Greendale, Greenfield, Hales Corners, St. Francis, Menomonee Falls, Mequon, New Berlin, Shorewood, Thiensville, Wauwatosa, West Allis and West Milwaukee.